

IN CHINA'S BORDER PROVINCES

*The Turbulent Career
of JOSEPH ROCK,
Botanist-Explorer*

by S. B. SUTTON

Illustrated with Photographs

HASTINGS HOUSE • PUBLISHERS *New York*

*To Imre Halász,
with love*

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IN CHINA'S BORDER PROVINCES

The Turbulent Career of Joseph Rock, Botanist-Explorer

HERE IS a most extraordinary disclosure of life in China's remote and mysterious Western Provinces. Unseen by diplomats, rarely penetrated by travelers, the border states of Choni, Muli, and Yungning are exposed as having been dominated by oppressive rulers, exploited by military factions, and ravaged by bandit raids. Few foreigners were welcome, yet "kings" and peasants opened their doors to a civilian scientist, Joseph Rock, who for nearly twenty-seven years (1922-1949) lived among them for the simple purpose of collecting plants for western museums and exploring and mapping mountains on the Tibetan border.

Joseph Rock was a self-made botanist, Austrian-born and naturalized American, who relished his solitary career in a society far different from his own. Funded by American museums he lived in style, was sought out by the Chinese rulers, most of whom were adolescent in their perceptions, and moved into the wilderness with an escort of soldiers and a group of carriers and muleteers. He entered the lamaseries of Tibet and observed the fantastic rituals and wierd dances of the "possessed"; he denounced the barbarous treatment of civil prisoners to the officials and recorded the unending "squeeze" of poor farmers and the senseless waste of human lives and natural resources. While seeking such exotic flora as the Chaumoolgra tree Rock became an explorer of remote terrain and added to western knowledge of the Amne Machin and Minya Konka, the latter, at 24,900 ft., towering on the Chinese-Tibetan border like another Everest. It was Rock who first told the western world about the designs in yak butter that are displayed at the annual butter festival that is quite unknown to tourists.

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From diaries, unpublished papers, and the testimony of contemporaries, S. B. Sutton was able to produce this unusual biography of a lone wolf of science, who was deeply involved in the social and political conditions that affected western China. Here is the political story from the inside, a first-hand account of how the local administrations were overrun, how the provincial governments fell, the coming of the National Republic under Chiang Kai-shek, the invasion of the Japanese, and the subsequent imposition of the communist order under the People's Republic. Rock's views supplement the accounts by Edgar Snow, Barbara Tuchman, Jacoby and White, and give new interpretations to revolutionary events. He served the U. S. Department of Agriculture, the U. S. Natural History Museum, the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, and supplied vivid accounts of his explorations to the National Geographic Magazine.



S. B. SUTTON was educated at Wells College and worked in New York doing research in international politics before she moved to Boston, where she makes her home. She has been a research fellow at the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University. Her earlier publications include a biography,

Charles Sprague Sargent and the Arnold Arboretum, and an edition of Frederick Law Olmsted's writings, *Civilizing American Cities*. She is presently working on a biography of Le Corbusier, the architect.





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